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News Release

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Tribe's High Tunnel Project Provides a Harvest for the People

STILLWATER, Okla., Oct. 6, 2016—The Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma is growing. From a recycling center to well managed pastures of grazing cattle, their lands straddling the Oklahoma-Missouri border are a hive of activity. With a little help from their latest [high tunnel](#) pilot project, Chief Glenna Wallace is hoping not even the changing seasons will slow them down.

“The Tribe is in the process of developing an Agriculture Department with the goal of expanding our food production,” Wallace said. “This project will help us do that.”

Similar to a greenhouse, but lighter and often not requiring electricity, high tunnels offer a range of benefits to growers. Often a primary motivation for setting up a high tunnel is to extend the growing season for fruit and vegetable plants. High tunnels can also improve plant and soil health, reduce nutrient and pesticide transportation and reduce energy inputs by providing a local source of fresh produce throughout the year.

The Tribe's high tunnel is nestled in a clearing surrounded by recently planted wildflower strips to support pollinators. The air is thick inside, and the plastic skin glows a soft green from the surrounding pine trees. Chief Wallace explains this first high tunnel began with the idea of creating a people's garden for the community. This year, the Tribe is experimenting with the concept to see what crops will work best with their soil and weather conditions.

Chief Wallace smiles proudly as she points out individual plants: “We have squash, cucumber, eggplant, onions, herbs, peppers, tomatoes, a big variety.”

The harvest from this crop will be integrated into meals for the Eastern Shawnee's elderly program, but as the project enters the next phase, they anticipate feeding many more people. A kitchen is planned for canning produce followed by a second high tunnel to supply food for the childcare center.

“We want to use high tunnels to support nutrition, elders, whole families. We want to grow the project as much as is viable,” said Chad Kelly, Tribal Administrator.

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By working with their local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) [field office](#) and Tribal Liaison, the Eastern Shawnee Tribe received assistance to build the high tunnel using the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP). The program has also assisted with other projects on their land, including a well and water tanks for cattle.

Currently, the Tribe leases their pasture for other farmers to graze cattle on. In time, Chief Wallace hopes they will be able to raise their own cattle and offer complete meals grown and raised entirely by the Tribe.

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